1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

they recognize Sekulu Sikīlīlē, the elder of the largest unit, as the village headman. Only in his village is there a dancing floor (*ocīlā*),[1] which is the centre of village life, social, legal, and recreational. As the name indicates, it is first and foremost a place for recreation, but here also religious functions are held since they involve so much dancing and drinking, and here formal cases are tried. The *ocīlā* is the heart of the village.

The Men's Club-House. Ngendo does not have that other important Umbundu institution, the Men's Club House (*onjango*).[2] The *onjango* is, or was, hardly less important than the *ocīlā*. Perhaps before it fell to its present state of disuse, its place was of even greater importance, for in the *onjango* all the men, youths, and boys gathered day by day for the evening meal. From all the kitchens came baskets of stiff corn porridge (*iputa*), and dishes of relish (*ombelela*)[3] which all shared, from the most honoured guest or the village elders, down to the naked, ash-whitened little boys just old enough (say from seven or eight years) to leave the kitchens to their mothers and sisters. In the *onjango* guests were entertained, judicial cases of lesser import were settled, the day's work and gossip discussed, and youth was educated by precept and example in nearly everything from traditional history to etiquette. The *onjango* was dining-room, living-room, court, school, hotel, and club, all in one. For some of the Ovimbundu it continues to function. Upon inquiry I found that in all Kasonge there were hardly ten villages where the *onjango* existed and retained its former functions. The reasons which my informants assigned are that the demands for road work (in the immediate region), for contract labour (involving absences of from six months to two years), and the difficulty of securing tax-money, did not leave the leisure required for the common meal in the *onjango*. When I made wider inquiries as to localities where the *onjango* now exists and retains its former functions, it seems that this institution is widely decadent. According to my information, the regions where it continues to function are chiefly in Ngalangi, in Viye, and

[1] *Ocīlā* comes from the verb *oku cīlā*, to dance.

[2] *Onjango* has been traced to the verb *oku ungula*, to converse, but I am doubtful of this derivation. It has been called 'The Palaver House', but this is an evident misnomer, for the *onjango* is much more than that.

[3] *Ombelela* is a word to cover any dish which may be eaten with the porridge staple. It may be meat, beans, mushrooms, or greens, and is preferred with gravy into which pieces of the stiff porridge may be dipped (*oku mīka*).

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

perhaps in Ndulu. In Ngendo the Men's Club had taken over the rocks just behind the headman's household for its meeting-place, but the meetings were only occasional and there was no common meal.

The Village Plan

To speak of the plan of an Umbundu village may seem a contradiction in terms, so haphazard seems the relation of houses, gardens, &c., to each other. Some houses are circular, but the majority are more nearly rectangular in shape. There is a palisade of hardwood sticks surrounding all the village except that side of the headman's household which is adjacent to the rocks used for a club-house. The headman had not bothered to keep up his own part of the fence since his only garden was a small tobacco plot fenced in by itself. The village is itself divided up by the palisades which shut off one compound from another, each compound containing the houses of from one to three households. Between the palisades are paths which lead on to the dancing floor and out of the village. In the village of Sekulu Sikilile there were twenty-five households with thirty-two houses in all. Each house (*onjo*) had its own granary (*onila*), and small chicken-coop built on stilts, and of all the houses only six had separate kitchens (*ocimo*). Nearly every household had separate pens for the pigs, goats, and sheep for the night. At one side of the headman's compound there was a common corral for the nine cattle which the villagers owned. Only the headman had a spirit-hut (*etambo*), used also for a storehouse, for entertaining a guest, and for his own bedroom should he sleep apart from his wives. Within the several compounds were small gardens of tobacco and of maize and beans, and just outside the village were two separate tobacco gardens. Just a few paces to the west was a small patch of wheat belonging to a man in the smallest ward. There was one household of two houses quite outside the palisades appropriately belonging to a man named *Kulika* (meaning 'Being-alone'). The water-holes and pounding rocks where meal was ground were between the several units of the village and were used in common. The fields were off to the east at from thirty minutes' to an hour's walk. The two smaller wards of Ciyanda and Kanjengo were so small that they were like two or three compounds by themselves. The former had six households with eight houses, and the latter

1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP 13 Mbundu FP 13

therefore the usual procedure is to erect temporary grass-covered huts (*olosingi*, plural) on the new site, in which they will live while building their houses. Each hearth-fire must be ignited from the headman's fire.

The houses are built by the occupants themselves. The men's club house is built by the communal labour of all men and boys with a simple ritual designed to promote concord within, and to ensure that the spirits (*olosande*) may find it a congenial abode. The spirits regularly attend the discussions in the *onjango*, and there receive their daily portions. There also they are believed to sleep.

At the first opportunity a hunt will be held and the meat brought to the spirit-hut. The girl who carried the sacred chest receives the heart and the boy the head. At this time, while a pot of sour beer (non-alcoholic) (*ocisangua*) is being brewed, the girl sits quietly in communion (*oku felevela*) with the spirits. With these physical and spiritual preparations the village community makes ready its home, a home which may seem poor and meagre to the eyes of outsiders, but to a member of the community it is home indeed and evokes in him, when absent, a feeling of great home-sickness (*ongeva*). As the Umbundu version of 'Home, Sweet Home' puts it:

Koliene, koliene, nda ku li ombambi ha yota
To your own, to your own, if there is cold you can warm yourself,
nda ku li onjala ha panga.
if there is hunger you can arrange.

Ngendo is surrounded by a stick palisade except on that side of the headman's household which is adjacent to the rocks used as a club-house. The village itself (and each section) is divided up into compounds, each of which contains one to three houses,(1) and palisades divide one compound from the next; between are paths leading to the *ocila* and out of the village. Small gardens for tobacco, maize and beans are within the compounds, and the larger fields lie outside the village at from thirty minutes' to an hour's walk. In the headman's section of Ngendo there are 25 households containing 32 houses in all. Each house has its own granary *(osila)* and a small chicken-coop built on stilts, and of all the houses only six have separate kitchens *(ociwo)*. Most households had separate pens for pigs, goats and sheep for the night,(2) and at one side of the headman's compound there is a common corral for the nine cattle owned by the section. Only the headman had a spirit-hut *(ecumbo)*, used also as a storehouse, for entertaining his guests, and for his own use should he wish to sleep apart from his wives.

Chiefs' villages or *olombala* (singular *ombala*) are often surrounded by a belt of tall trees.(3) The chief's compound (the *ilombe*) is larger than those of other villagers, and, according to Hambly,(4) usually contains: the chief's house, which always has a separate sleeping-room; a house and a kitchen for each of his wives; a tomb for the burial of the chief and his wives; a house of meditation for the chief, and pens for pigs and chickens.

Umbundu houses are usually circular, but sometimes rectangular, and made of wattle and daub, with thatched roofs. Sometimes huts are divided by matting into a living-room and a sleeping-room. Cooking is often done in the house itself, but sometimes a separate hut is built as a kitchen.(5)

The *onjango* (the Men's Club House), consists of a cone-shaped roof set on stout hardwood poles instead of a wall, and left open so that those for whom there may be no place inside may still see and hear what takes place within.(6)

Villages are moved when fields are exhausted and others are not available nearby(7) or, more often, when there has been illness or death in the village, which implies that some action displeasing to the spirits has been committed. (No information is available concerning the usual length of life of a village.) When the new site is chosen, the headman's fire in the old village is extinguished, and a procession starts, led by a boy carrying the sacred bows *(ohonji)* of each ascendant who is now a guardian spirit of the family (i.e. the *olusi*), and a girl carrying the sacred chest *(ocimbangu)* containing the relics *(ociye)* and the balls of iguana skin.(8) On arriving at the site the boy and girl cut and plant the

(1) In this section there were 13 goats, 20 sheep, 100 pigs and about 100 chickens. (Childs, op.cit. p.31) (2) Ibid.
(3) Hambly, (2) 1934, p.206 *et.al.* It was a custom of the Ngangela peoples to plant trees round the village and dedicate them to deceased chiefs. (See McCulloch 1950 p.68.) There is no evidence that the trees surrounding Umbundu villages have any ritual significance, although the custom may have been taken over from the conquered Ngangela peoples.
(4) Op.cit., p.208. (5) Ibid., p.10
(6) Childs, personal communication.
(7) Due often to European settlement. (8) See below, p.47.

The use of caterpillars as food is noted (p. 416): "A man cut open a large cocoon, extracted the contents, and smacked his lips with great gusto." My field notes mention the use of caterpillars as food.

Capello and Ivens (1877–80) remark on the burial places of hunters which are distinguishable by the skulls of antelopes, buffalo, and hippopotamuses, stuck on upright poles, mixed with skulls of oxen killed in honor of the defunct. The writers noted that a heap of stones protected the body. I photographed two types of cairn in the regions of Ganda and Luimbale respectively. Capello and Ivens are not precise in their locality, but I judge it to have been Long. 17° E. and Lat. 13° S., a considerable distance from my own observations (Plates XXXII, Fig. 1; LXXIV, Fig. 1).

I photographed the stilt-walkers at the final stages of the initiation ceremonies at Cangamba. These men had no costumes; on the contrary they were almost naked but were covered with white clay. Capello and Ivens (p. 295), saw a stilt-walker with a feathered mask and a netting costume. Such attire I saw on an Uluchazi medicine-man, but not on the stilt-walkers (Plate LXXXI, Figs. 1, 2).

I was unable to obtain information about the stilt-walkers, but Capello states that they castigated misdemeanants, punished shameless women, and accused criminals. Capello and Ivens were 187 miles to the northwest of my area of observation. The Uluchazi medicine-man, who appeared with the stilt-walkers during my visits, was said to make bad magic for women. The men ignored him but women gathered round in a derisive way; they quickly scattered when he pursued them.

Serpa Pinto, who made his journey across Angola in 1878, has so many references to customs and objects still extant, that I propose to tabulate his observations because of their value in showing the preservation of indigenous traits in spite of Portuguese contacts.

The body of a chief is buried with a covering of oxhide. Many oxen are sacrificed at the death of a king. The heir to the deceased is bound to sacrifice his whole herd in order to regale his people and give peace to the departed (S. Pinto, I, p. 63). The Ovimbundu conform at the present time to similar methods of burial and sacrifice.

Near Huambo, Serpa Pinto saw in every village a kind of "temple for conversation." This is the *onjango*, that I have described and photographed (Plate XLVIII, Fig. 1). It is the house in which all males foregather for the evening meal, which is brought by their women (I, p. 96).

The gathering and eating of caterpillars is described. This continues today (I, p. 120).

3: Hambly E-5 (1929-1930) 1934 FP13 Mbundu F

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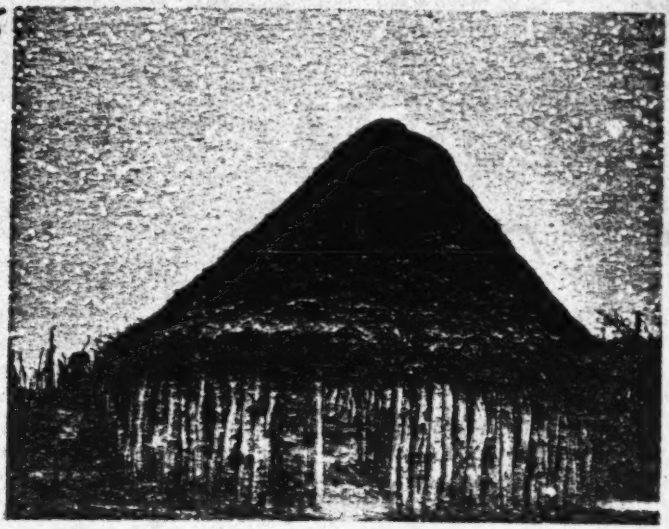

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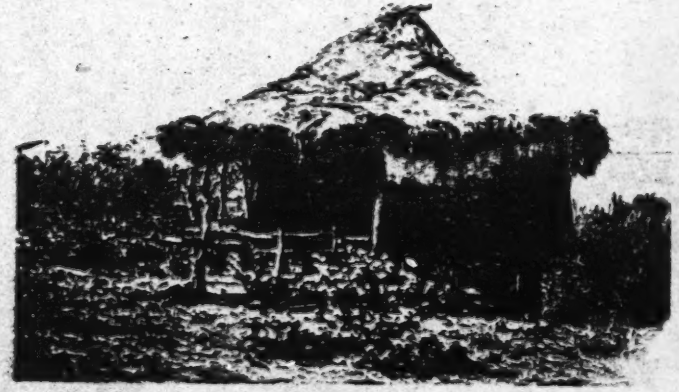

2

SOCIAL LIFE OF OVIMBUNDU

Fig. 1. Men's club house, Bailundo. Fig. 2. Guest house, Bimbe

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